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THE TRIUMPH OF THE INNOCENTS.

(See the frontispiece of this number.)

HOLMAN HUNT is preëminently the painter of Protestantism. John Ruskin has called his "Triumph of the Innocents" the greatest religious picture of the century. Like other work of the artist, the picture is a decided departure from the conventional. It has been subjected to the widest range of varied criticism, and has not been popular, because misunderstood. To one it is "Browning translated into paint;" to another it seems a "dream full of real forms, lucid and beautiful, yet tremulous with mystical meaning."

The full title of the picture is "The Flight into Egypt and the Triumph of the Innocents." If the fact be borne in mind that it represents a vision of two worlds, the spiritual and the physical, seen at one glance, the deep significance of the artist's thought will be easier apprehended.

Combining the evangelist Matthew's account with an early tradition of the church, the artist has placed the incident in the second April of the young Christ's life, when he was sixteen months old. Joseph, sturdy of limb, with a well-filled tool basket slung over his shoulder, gazes back anxiously at the watch fires of Herod that burn on the distant hills. He is leading an ass of the royal Mecca breed, bearing the Child and mother, who looks down upon him with the divinest of all human love as he leans back against her caressingly. Something in his manner is strangely reassuring. Her mother heart, until then heavy with fear, responds to his buoyant joyousness, and in turn illumines her face as with a burst of sunshine after the blackness of storm. The glorified spirits of the murdered children of Bethlehem, a happy garlanded band, the "flowers of the martyrs," and first of that glorious company whose shining ranks are nearest the throne of the Slain One, have come to accompany Jesus in the flight. He has just caught sight of his martyred playmates, visible to him only, and turns with radiant greeting, holding towards them a handful of wheat ears typical of the Bread of Life.

This is the picture within the picture which makes the conception a "stereoscopic vision of two worlds."



W. Holman Hunt

TRIUMPH OF THE INNOCENTS

One great charm of the painting is in the grouping and beauty of these heavenly children, whose heads alone of all the company scintillate with the brightness of glorified existence. The different groups represent advancing stages of the life beyond. In the sky of the background are three little ones, who have not yet awakened to the joy of heaven. Their faces still bear the marks of sleep and grief, and shadowy halos hover over them. The middle group is wreathed with scarlet anemones as victims of sacrifice, and with blossoming branches in their hands are merrily urging forward the loitering foal. The foremost young saint looks down upon the rent made in his garment by the sword thrust and, wondering, finds no scar upon his new flesh. The trio leading are realizing the fuller significance of their happiness and privilege. One sings as he raises a smoking censer in token of worship, and the others are casting down before the Child King branches of the palm and vine, significant of victory and fruitful service.

These celestial children, in the exuberance of heaven's own haleness, dance along upon a dream stream that flows side by side with the real water reflecting the stars, and into which Joseph is stepping. It represents the river of life, and its vapors float away in the form of silvery bubbles, upon which are reflected scenes from that reign of holiness which He who now rides triumphant as King of hearts in the royal beauty of his childhood shall inaugurate.

JOHN POWELL LENOX.